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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KCRM](#) [KCOR](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT PASSES ANTI-TRAFFICKING
IN PERSONS LEGISLATION

REF: 07 TASHKENT 1806

Classified By: Political Officer Tim Buckley for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) Summary: On March 18 the Oliy Majlis, the lower house of the Uzbek parliament, passed a draft anti-trafficking in persons (TIP) law on the third and final reading. The next step is for the Senate to approve the law, which is listed as the number one agenda item for the upcoming March 27 plenary session and likely only a formality. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) announced they will be conducting a Central Asia regional forum on trafficking in persons in mid-May in Tashkent, and the Government of Uzbekistan will likely ensure the law is signed prior to this major event, just as it touted its abolition of the death penalty and habeas corpus changes at the recent USAID-funded conference held in Tashkent on March 5-6. Final adoption of this law will be the most significant legislative step Uzbekistan has taken thus far in the fight against trafficking in persons and suggests the government is finally serious about delivering on its oft-stated promises to confront the issue. Uzbekistan was stung by the Tier 3 rating in last year's TIP Report but appears serious about taking the requisite actions to meet this important benchmark in getting off the Tier 3 list. End summary.

Legislative Fast Track

12. (SBU) On February 21 the Oliy Majlis passed the "first reading" of the draft anti-trafficking in persons law, meaning that the legislative body adopted the law in principle but without details. The "second reading" with modifications was passed on March 13 and, finally, on the third and final reading, it passed on March 18. This marked the draft law's final passage in the Oliy Majlis. The three

votes in less than a month are unusually quick, indicating the draft law is on a legislative fast track after three years in gestation in the Presidential Apparatus. The anti-TIP legislation now goes to the Senate for approval, which will likely just be a formality. The anti-TIP legislation has already been listed as the number one agenda item on the upcoming March 27 plenary session of the Uzbek Senate.

Some Loopholes

13. (C) While the draft legislation sped through the parliament, lawmakers were apparently instructed not to discuss the details with journalists. A March 19 article in the independent www.uznews.net, noted that "it is not yet decided when and how to inform the public about it." This suggests the Government of Uzbekistan has not worked out all of the kinks in its new-found rush to deliver legislation. With uncharacteristic frankness, Nadyr Kurbanov, a senior police investigator within the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), told the media prior to the final debates that "the law is not perfect: it allows for middlemen to evade responsibility for these crimes." This is consistent with what poloff was told months ago by Nodira Karimova (please protect), Director of the key local anti-trafficking NGO Istiqbolli Avlod, who was nonetheless thrilled that the legislation finally made its way to -- and through -- parliament. (Comment: Until post gets a copy of the final adopted legislation to analyze, we cannot speculate on what loopholes, if any, there may be in what has been billed as Uzbekistan's first "comprehensive" anti-TIP law. End comment.)

OSCE/UNODC Regional Workshop

14. (SBU) The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) have announced a regional workshop entitled "Promoting Law Enforcement and Judicial Cooperation among Source, Transit, and Destination Countries to Combat Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling to and from Central Asia" in Tashkent on May 14-15. It is designed to complement an ongoing UNODC project that was recently launched in Uzbekistan, but it is significant that the Government of Uzbekistan is hosting the event. (Comment: We believe the Government of Uzbekistan will ensure the new anti-TIP law is passed by the Senate and signed by the President prior to this event so that the Government of Uzbekistan can claim credit for long-promised progress on this issue. This is exactly what the Government of Uzbekistan did in the recent USAID-funded human rights and law enforcement conference, when it highlighted newly enacted legal reforms to abolish the death penalty and transfer authority to issue arrest warrants to courts. End comment.)

Comment:

15. (SBU) After three years of discussing, vetting, delaying the introduction of comprehensive anti-TIP legislation, the Government of Uzbekistan appears to be following through on its commitment last fall to take tangible forward anti-TIP steps once the Presidential elections were over (reftel). The rapid passage of the legislation by the Oliy Majlis is the most significant step Uzbekistan has taken thus far in addressing the serious human trafficking problem that exists in this source country. The prominent placement of the legislation on the upcoming Senate calendar suggests the Government of Uzbekistan is serious about finally delivering substantive progress. Uzbekistan was stung by last year's Tier 3 designation on the TIP Report, and is now following through on one of the most important benchmarks we identified to remove Uzbekistan from the Tier 3 list.

HANSON